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C South Vietnam: Sharp ground battles developed near the Demilitarized Zone, south of Da Nang, and in the Mekong Delta on 23-24 March, as the enemy's current offensive entered its fifth week.

The Communists directed mortar and rocket fire against the US base area at Long Binh, north of Saigon, as well as against the Da Nang air base and some 25 lesser targets throughout South Vietnam.

Allied spoiling operations and B-52 strikes are probably responsible for the enemy's failure to conduct more substantial ground assaults in the area surrounding Saigon during the past few days. The evidence continues to indicate that the Communists are still trying to get set for new attacks near the capital.

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25X1 [redacted] says that he was assisting two enemy battalions targeted against the Cholon sector of Saigon. A flurry of mortar and rocket attacks against allied positions along the corridor approaching Saigon from the west appears to have been intended to screen the movement of Communist units moving from that direction.

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A preliminary report that 359,000 artillery rounds were destroyed by an enemy attack in Binh Dinh Province was in error. Later reporting indicates that about 37,000 artillery and mortar rounds and some 7,000 mines were destroyed. [redacted]

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Laos: The government is taking steps to blunt moves it expects the enemy to make in the northeast.

An intensive air campaign has been launched to disrupt Communist offensive capabilities near the Plaine des Jarres, and present plans call for at least three more weeks of heavy strikes. Pilots have reported a large number of secondary explosions resulting from their attacks.

The Communists have moved cautiously since capturing Na Khang over three weeks ago, and the recent loss of a number of government positions in the area has been more a result of the sagging morale of government troops than of enemy ground assaults.

The air strikes may upset the enemy's timing, or cause the Communists otherwise to forgo offensive actions in order to defend their rear areas. On the other hand, the heavy strikes, directed against positions that have been inviolate up to now for political reasons, could trigger a sharp enemy response.

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International Communism: Communist party sources acknowledge that unresolved issues have forced another postponement of the world Communist conference.

The preparatory committee of 67 Communist parties met in Moscow from 18 to 22 March to approve draft documents and to fix a precise date for the conference, previously scheduled for sometime in May. Differences over the language of the documents, however, required that another full committee meeting be scheduled 23 May and that the conference itself be set back to 5 June.

[The leader of the Italian party delegation yesterday issued a statement to the press in Moscow which plainly indicated that the Italians had taken exception to the draft proposed by the Russians. While the Italian statement did not specify which were the contested issues, Western press sources in Moscow believe, probably rightly, that the Italians balked at the Soviet position on three points: The invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Sino-Soviet border conflict, and the rift between Moscow and Belgrade. A Moscow Radio broadcast has conceded that the basic draft document has been referred back to the central committees of the various parties for further scrutiny.]

Budapest Radio also admitted yesterday that there were differences of views. Broadcasts from Prague and Belgrade referred to the "complicated situation" within the world Communist movement.

The general course steered by the Soviets toward a world conference has wound through five major meetings in 1968 and several lower-level sessions of groups working on the main conference document. Throughout, Moscow has faced dissent and delay. The opposition is variously reported to have

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come mainly from the Communist parties of Italy, Rumania, France, Great Britain, Austria, and Spain.

The Soviets have now been able to fix a date for the conference, but they have little cause for satisfaction over the outcome of the latest meeting and little assurance that things will get better. If Moscow had hoped to exploit the Sino-Soviet border problem in its quest for greater discipline in the Communist world, it has been disappointed. Some parties even appear willing to take advantage of the dispute to enlarge their own area of independence. [redacted]

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Pakistan: The government appears to be moving more decisively to end the turmoil throughout the country, even as opposition politicians step up their pre-election activities.

Within the past week, President Ayub has appointed new governors for both East and West Pakistan. The new governor of West Pakistan is already taking action to sort out the chaotic labor situation in his province. Although the new East Pakistani governor was a member of the previous provincial government, he is reported to be acceptable to the key opposition leader in the province.

Troops are again being used to restore order. They were called into Karachi Sunday to guard strategic sites and have recently enforced curfews in parts of East Pakistan. Ayub has issued a plea to his people to settle down, and the home minister has served notice that the disorders must stop. There is still a possibility that the government will resort to martial law, and the armed forces have increased their readiness for this contingency.

Opposition leaders are going their separate ways following the end of talks with Ayub ten days ago. Most participants in the conference have accepted the limited agreement reached there and are now pressing their individual causes. For example, Mujibur Rahman, the key East Pakistani leader who called the conference a failure, is nevertheless conducting an election campaign. He has been urging a return to peaceful agitation and has exerted a calming influence among the Bengalis.

The urban areas of East Pakistan appear to have quieted somewhat, perhaps as a result of weariness over the protracted agitation and civil disruption. Reports from the Bengali countryside, however, continue to depict violence and chaos. [redacted]

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USSR: Soviet scientists are moving ahead with efforts to find ways to reduce the dangers to humans from accidental loss of oxygen in space or underwater environments.

An article in a recent Soviet scientific journal indicates that one approach the Soviets are using is to look for pharmaceutical agents which will increase the body's ability to cope with the effects produced by deficiency of oxygen. Two Soviet pharmacologists at a military medical academy in Leningrad which supports space and underwater science write that so far they have reviewed four classes of agents for this purpose. Among the substances examined were certain stimulants of blood circulation and breathing, various depressants such as tranquilizers, vitamins and hormones affecting the rate at which the body uses up energy, and other drug preparations which would increase the body's resistance to oxygen starvation.

The Soviets claim to have found one preparation to be effective in prolonging the life of experimental animals that were deprived of normal oxygen intake; this substance is to be tried out on humans in Soviet clinics. Up to now, however, the Soviets do not seem to have made any breakthrough of their own in this field, but are exploiting known pharmaceutical agents and information they obtain from the West. [redacted]

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Spain: The government's decision to lift the state of emergency today--a month in advance of its 90-day limit--is a concession to moderate officials who considered the decree an excessive reaction to the student and labor unrest.

The decree did serve to warn discontented factions that the government will not tolerate demonstrations and is prepared to take strong measures to maintain order. During the state of emergency, a small number of young professors were sent into exile and several Communist groups in the Barcelona area were broken up.

Two months of press censorship may make more cautious a number of newspapers that had spoken out against the government's inflexibility. Although the information minister announced that prior press censorship would now be dropped, the government will still be able to discourage criticism by various means developed since the press law went into effect in 1966.

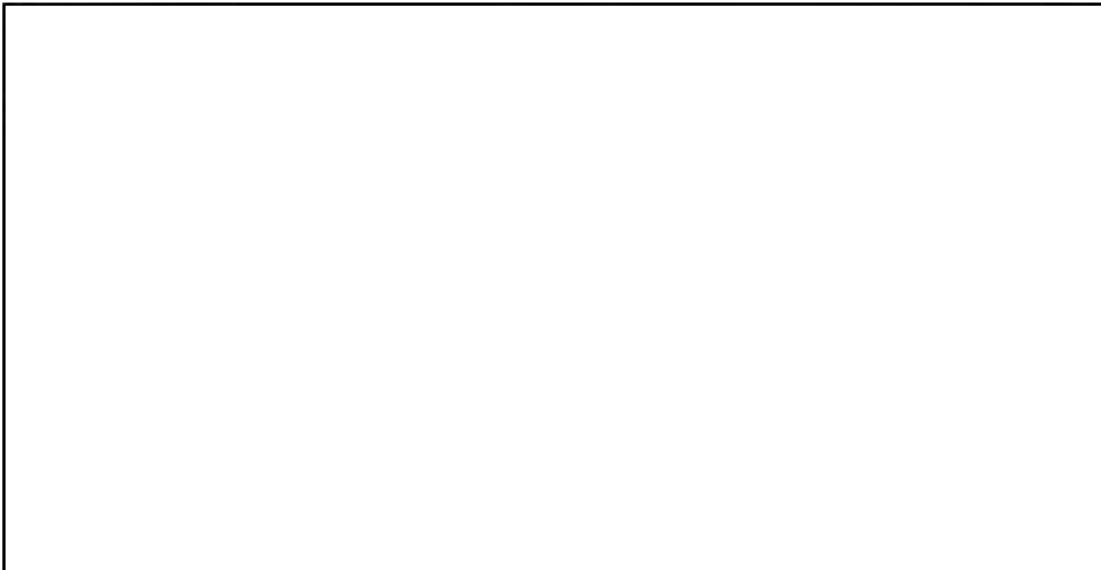
The timing of the government's action was undoubtedly influenced by the forthcoming celebration, on 1 April, of the 30th anniversary of the end of the Civil War. Madrid was also concerned that foreign journalists attending the Eurovision festival soon to be held in Spain would report critically on the suspension of liberties and thus discourage tourism. In addition, the government was reportedly apprehensive over the effect the continuance of the state of emergency would have on the bases agreement negotiations being held this week in Washington.

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Italy: Rome now is considering choosing SECAM, the French color TV system, which can interchange programs with the Soviet network, instead of the German PAL, which is compatible with the US system. The North African countries will use SECAM, and Italy would like to broadcast its programs throughout the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, SECAM patent holders are evidently making attractive offers to Italian manufacturers.

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